

RHODE ISLAND STATE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

17 Smith Avenue, Greenville, RI 02828

401-949-1480

MEETING MINUTES

January 22, 2010

9:15 AM

USDA/NRCS Conference Room

The meeting was called to order at 9:20

Present: Eric Offenbergh, Chair; Ken Ayars, DEM; Richard Hart, Emerson Wildes, Ron Mucci, ERICD; Paul Dolan, Gina DeMarco, NRICD; Pooh Vongkhamdy, NRCS; Dick Went, RIACD; Harriet Powell, Clarkson Collins, Doug McGovern, SRICD; Kristen Castrataro, URI Coop Extension; Susan Korte, Providential Gardener; Nancy Hess, SPP; Ramona LeBlanc SCC.

I. Minutes

A motion was made to accept the November 12, 2009 minutes: Paul/Harriet: unanimous.

II. Financial Reports

A motion was made to acknowledge receipt of the financial reports: Paul/Harriet: no discussion; a motion was made to accept the reports as presented: Harriet/Paul: unanimous.

III. Old Business

A. SE & SC Handbook: Grant application previously discussed was denied. RC & D will continue to look for a source of funding to revise the handbook.

B. Reorganization: Eric reviewed the need for the Districts to move towards self-sufficiency in RI's current economic climate as well as the efforts of the SCC over the last year to develop a reorganization policy, to create an agricultural technical assistance position and to restructure the administration of the FFOS program. He asked the SCC to vote to accept the reorganization policy and to view the next four months as a transition period during which the policy can be revised as needed for smooth implementation.

On behalf of DEM, Ken Ayars endorsed Eric's comments and position. As it goes through its own massive reorganization which includes merging and closing offices, Ken warned that DEM will not support a budget that funds three separate Conservation Districts. The functions of the District remain the same but one central administrative office is necessary.

Pooh noted that NRCS has also reorganized to meet changing needs.

On behalf of their Districts, Harriet and Paul expressed their support of the reorganization. Harriet noted the need to try a new approach since the old one no longer seems to work. Paul reiterated the need to follow the DEM model of merging and sharing resources and brought attention to the opportunities presented by working together to find more funding sources to get more programs into the Districts.

Eastern District, through Emerson and Dick Hart, expressed concern over the reorganization policy. They recognized that streamlining is a good idea but they have reservations. There is concern that the memo was confusing, that the benefits of reorganization will not be evenly shared between the Districts and that the Eastern District cannot function as they would like without an office.

The SCC advised that only administration will move to a central location. Other District staff will remain in the Districts. While a pro bono office is optimal and DEM will help to find and furnish such locations, the staff could work without one.

A motion was made to accept the Reorganization Policy dated 12/17/09 and to evaluate progress in four months: Harriett/Paul; unanimous.

A letter will be sent to DEM and NRCS to outline the changes adopted by the policy. Chip Young will prepare a final report for the RI Foundation. An additional RIF grant will be applied for to promote the Conservation Districts.

A current grant proposal seeks funding from Innovative Solutions for Non-Profits, Inc. to implement the reorganization.

C. FFOS: Work is underway to revamp the application process and the process of developing conservation plans for the farm designation in FFOS. Values have not changed in several years and nearby states have decided to maintain current values despite increase in land values. The FFOS subcommittee will meet on 2/8/10 and will address these topics. An outline of the program will be presented to the CD's after that meeting.

One appointment to the FFOS subcommittee has been made by the Governor and awaits Senate approval. The other appointment is in process.

D. Ag Tech Position: An ad has been placed and several applications received for this position. The review and interviews will begin soon. The ad will be forwarded to the CD's.

IV. New Business

A: State Appropriation Disbursement: The additional State funding check received by SRICD, which has previously been split between the 3 CD's, will now be forwarded to the SCC as part of the consolidated Districts budget.

B. SCC Composition: By current State law, there are five (5) voting members of the SCC: The Director of DEM or his designee and four (4) appointees of the Governor. There must be at least one member

from each District. There are currently three vacant seats on the SCC. Eric is a member but his term expired several years ago. Harriet and Paul were previously members and they have not been replaced, so they are still active, but these seats need to be appointed by the Governor. Each District is asked to submit recommendations for the vacant seats. One is required from each District. The appointees do not necessarily need to be District Directors. Recommendations will be discussed at the next SCC meeting.

C. CIG: Remaining funds in this agreement will be used to conduct workshops to produce viable pre-proposals for the program. An amendment of the agreement will be developed.

V. Reports

A. ERICD: No report.

B. NRICD: Compost bins will be sold as part of the Seedling Sale this year.

Two shareholder workshops were conducted as part of the Lake Invasives contract.

The District is working with Scituate High School students to develop a forestry management plan. They are working to regain tree farm status. The water quality of the PWSB was ranked 2nd best in the

country. The Water Festival will be held on May 4. Gina is to meet with Ken Burke /Water Resources Board.

C. SRICD: Doug McGovern has been hired as District Manager. Carl Sawyer has rejoined to Board as an Associate Director and will get signatures for election/appointment as a full director. The District is in discussion with Town of Narragansett to do resource mapping of Canochet Farm. Also pursuing work with land trusts and the CIG program. Clark is working to develop a business plan.

D. URI: A Small Farm Dream workshop series will begin soon. Kristen continues to work with the Ag Partnership.

E. State Planning: The State's water supply plan and energy plan are being updated. Nancy will join the Ag Partnership.

F. NRCS: A new DC will be hired for Eastern District. There is a need to update resource inventory in each District and Pooh hopes to begin this--with District help—after the April 10 EQIP deadline. Pooh is looking to have energy audit workshops which the CD's could attend pro bono. If CD's have certified TSP, they will be poised to work when funding available.

The hoop house initiative has received a good response.

VI. Other

The State Conservation Committee payroll will begin on February 1, 2010.

District financial support for centralized administration will begin on February 1, 2010.

A motion to adjourn was made at 11:20: Harriet/Paul, unanimous.